



# LUKE DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

## OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

*“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6*

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

**Lifegroup 12s**

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

**Lifegroup 3s**

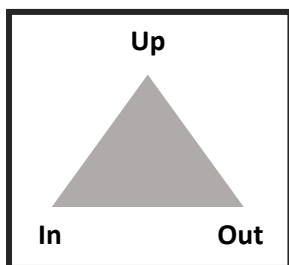
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

## A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

### Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

### In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

### Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

# HOW TO USE THE BOOK

## First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

## Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

## Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

## Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

**This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.**

## INTRODUCTION TO LUKE

Let me introduce you to Doctor Luke. Most likely a Gentile by birth, and, apparent by his writings, very well educated in Greek culture, Luke is a physician by profession. He is a companion of Paul at various times from Paul's second missionary journey to his final prison term in Rome. My favourite characteristic of Luke is that he is a loyal friend who remains with the Apostle Paul after others had deserted him (read about this in 2 Timothy 4). Luke writes two books – this third Gospel and the book of Acts. He calls them both 'orderly accounts'. He writes the first book to present the works and teachings of Jesus that are especially important for understanding the way of salvation. He writes the second book to present the works of the Holy Spirit and to introduce us to the church.

The range of the Gospel according to Luke is unique in that he starts from the birth of Jesus and takes us right through to His ascension. While the Gospel according to Matthew is written mostly to Jews, Doctor Luke takes in the Gentile audience as well and he seems quite able to appeal to both.

So, get the coffee brewed, gather your Bible, journal and a pen. I trust you enjoy!

Phil

### Live

I love how God is a God of order. I learned something very powerful as a young believer that has stood by me for over half a century now: the Word of God contains His divine law and His established principles. Engrain them into your heart and mind and you will never go wrong. Luke, a physician, takes up his pen, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and writes, *“an orderly account”*. This is not wishy-washy storytelling, oh no, that would never do for the pages of Holy Writ. He even takes it one step further, saying, *“that you may know those things wherein you were instructed.”* I love this. This is going to be a great devotional! While we get to glean from this amazing book, it is important to note that it was written to a person, Theophilus by name. The fact that he is referred to as *“most excellent”* shows he was a man of influence and most likely a Roman government official. The books of Luke and Acts run into each other; both are penned by Luke, and so many theologians think they could be Paul's defence for his trial before Caesar.

Two big responses to God stare us in the face today as He showed up with classified information. One was from a revered church leader with years of experience; the other from a teenage girl. The well-respected Zacharias was a Jewish priest who served in the temple daily. When an angel turned up for a chat, his response was unbelief and lack of faith, for which he was struck dumb for the full length of his wife's pregnancy. On the other hand, Mary was just a normal run-of-the-mill Jewish girl. No airs, no graces, not born in the rich side of town, but when an angel turns up and tells her she will conceive a child via the Holy Spirit, without any sexual contact with a man, she says, and I quote from the New Living Translation, *“I am the Lord's servant. May everything You have said about me come true.”* How beautiful is this response!

### Pray

Father, today I pray Mary's Song, *“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour ... for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation.”* In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

This chapter is full of beginnings, covering the first twelve years of Jesus' life on earth. It makes me ask so many questions. How would I feel about a couple who were not officially married and the woman was pregnant? How would I feel about putting my firstborn child in a feeding trough? How often do God's plans for me involve inconveniences, and how do I react to them?

I am so full of questions today because this chapter is so full of glory and splendour ... the arrival of the Saviour on earth, His humble and traumatic beginnings when there is no room in the local hotel ... the angel breaking through into our atmosphere, visibly and audibly announcing Jesus' arrival to a bunch of shepherds ... the reaction of a Godly widow named Anna ... Jesus' growth as a boy ... how His mother pondered all that was going on in her heart. Today, let's take some time and ponder this chapter that will leave you almost out of breath. We are told Joseph went up to Bethlehem, which from Nazareth is about eighty miles. In those days, this was a significant undertaking, costing time and money. According to Roman law, Mary didn't have to go with Joseph for the tax census, but it made sense for her to go, especially because she was in the latter stages of a controversial pregnancy, surely the subject of much gossip in Nazareth. Joseph had already accepted her as his wife, according to Matthew's account in 1:24, while keeping the consummation of their marriage until after the birth of Jesus, according to Matthew 1:25. I love the simplicity of how Luke unfolds the greatest story ever told. He says Mary "*brought forth*" or "*gave birth to*" her first child, a son. We are not told that anyone assisted Mary in the birth, though someone may have. One way or another, this young woman was completely separated from all her family and supporting friends, who lived back in Nazareth. I often wonder what Joseph must have been feeling. I'm sure that it was something wonderful and weird.

### Pray

Father, what mystery, what beauty, what wonder. I never tire of this amazing story of God becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Help me read it with fresh eyes and understanding today. In the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

One has to be impressed with John the Baptist, a forerunner whom God raised up to prepare a road for Christ. This chapter calls him a *“voice calling in the wilderness, ‘prepare the way for the Lord’s coming’ ”*. I can’t think of a grander title for him as he was the connector between the Old and the New Covenant. If we asked a child what they thought about John the Baptist after reading today’s chapter, I’m sure their response would be worthy of note. It is very easy to categorise John as being kind of weird, and we could certainly say he was quite hostile! This, however, could mar our view of John as a prophet, and could also lead us to miss the greatness and marvellous qualities of this unique individual. As you look at John, you have to admire and desire his qualities. John was a man of distinction, a very unique individual, a man who stood out from the crowd. John was a popular and powerful communicator and preacher. He was a man of great insight into the sinfulness of people and society, and obviously the gift of the prophet enhanced that powerfully. John was a man of integrity, a man of prayer, and a man of humility. He was someone who declared himself unworthy to untie the latchet of Jesus’ shoe, who said he must decrease, and Jesus must increase. What a role model, what an incredible man! We know he was martyred by Herod for his stance for truth and justice, but one of my big stand outs is at the baptism of Jesus. After John baptised Jesus, Jesus came up out of the water and we are told the Spirit came on Him in a tangible way, like a dove, and *“a voice”* spoke from heaven, the voice of the Father. Greater was this voice than the mere voice of one calling in the wilderness. This was the voice that overrules all voices. I love this. One word from God is worth a lifetime of human wisdom in its highest form.

### Pray

Father, I really need some of John’s holy boldness and the attributes that we read about today: integrity, honesty, power, and anointing. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

Today I am reminded of a line that Jesus taught His disciples when they asked Him to teach them to pray: *“And lead us not into temptation”*. Now let’s admit it, this is the bit we struggle with most, temptation. We need to keep our hearts focused on God and His ways because, as we see in our reading today, there is an enemy of our souls who knows our weak frame, one who studies us intensely and seeks to steal, kill and destroy our lives in Christ. In the three temptation challenges of Satan recorded by Matthew and Luke, we find three primary avenues by which Satan seeks to devastate our spiritual walk with God: what we eat, representing our flesh and its desires; who and what we worship; and our desire for approval and popularity. Our survival as saints depends upon us knowing both Satan and ourselves, and thereby putting on the *“full armour of God”* to withstand his attacks.

It is not only interesting, but completely imperative that we note the order of events. Jesus, in the previous chapter, stepped into His calling and obeyed His Father in identifying with us as sinners by being baptised (even though He had no need to do so in connection with personal sin because He had none). Next, God spoke from heaven and affirmed His identity, ‘You are My Son and I love You.’ Amazing, do you not think, that of all the things God could have said, like some tips for coming face to face with Satan, He simply declared His identity and assured Him of His love? After this affirmation, the Holy Spirit led Jesus to a combat with Satan in which Jesus came out the victor. After this sequence of events, Jesus headed to Nazareth, went into the temple, opened the scroll and revealed Himself as the Messiah in the prophetic utterance from Isaiah 61. Interestingly, it went down like a lead balloon. People began to say, ‘Hold on, isn’t this Joseph’s son?’ Familiarity definitely led to contempt as they not only ran Him out of town, but they actually sought to kill Him.

**Pray**

Father, please give me today a fresh dose of determination and will-power. Help me not to give in so easily, and help me remember that You have promised not to allow me to be tempted beyond my limit. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

I am always excited by how Jesus calls His followers. Looking at how Peter and Andrew could cast a net to fish, He calls them to be fishers of men. Then He comes on James and John, mending; these men became the menders and establishers of the early church. How ingenious is our Saviour, calling out our natural abilities for His kingdom purposes. He knows our talents and abilities even more than we know them ourselves. It makes all the difference in the world when our work is directed by Jesus. Sometimes we end up working hard instead of smart. How many things do we miss out on because we make excuses instead of doing what Jesus said? One of the biggest hindrances for us is past failures. In this chapter today, we see how Peter had fished all night with no results and when, reluctantly, he obeyed Jesus, he had instantly positive results. This story of the great catch is more than just a fishing story; it is not the fish that are hooked and caught but the fishermen – Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew, and their partners, James and John. From this point on, Luke informs us, these men left their jobs as fishermen and followed Jesus wherever He went. This event is therefore one of the turning points in the lives of the disciples. It should not be overlooked that Peter, James and John, three of the fishermen named here, are the inner circle of disciples, the three who were privileged to witness events that the other disciples did not see, like the transfiguration and the raising of Jarius' daughter. Think today of the things that Jesus may be calling out in you. What are you good at that you could give to Him?

As we read the rest of the chapter today, we see Jesus beginning His ministry in healing the sick. Verse 30 in the NLT records the Pharisees wanting to know why He would eat and drink with such scum! I love how Jesus is the Saviour of the whole world!

**Pray**

Father, today I choose to listen to You with more intent and instant obedience. Forgive me for trying to paddle my own canoe, even when it is going upstream. Help me to be a strong follower of Jesus today and every day. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

I love that God is full of surprises. It was the same when Jesus was on earth. He certainly didn't fit into a previous mould. This, however, upsets people who feel secure only with neatly structured beliefs that are left untouched. Every now and then God chooses to do something new and fresh, and when that happens, the old structures creak and strain. The religious people in today's chapter couldn't abide the challenges that Jesus brought. They couldn't cope with Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath day. I have always loved this story. I think of this man with the withered hand as one who was hidden away. Maybe he was embarrassed by his deformity. Most likely he was judged and condemned in his day as unclean or at least as a sinner upon whom God had poured out His indignation. Jesus pulls him from the background, from his hiding place in the shadows, and makes him stand centre stage. Then Jesus tells him to stretch forth that which was deformed and hidden, unusable, depleted and broken. Notice that Luke doesn't record Jesus touching him or praying anything. This man's simple act of faith in stretching out that which was unused brings a miracle.

I think you know where I'm heading with this! Think of the things in your life that have been in the shadows. You've hid them through shame, guilt, and sheer embarrassment. What if Jesus were putting you right in the centre stage today and saying, 'Come on, stretch it forth, reach out, allow Me to redeem and make whole that which was broken and unusable.'

In this chapter, we also read of the twelve men Jesus chose. Take a little bit of time and look them up in whatever study guide you use. I don't think you will be awfully impressed by any of them. Yet, in the presence of the Master, He makes all things usable. He brings beauty out of ashes, and redeems even the worst of stories. This is why we love Him!

**Pray**

Father, help me to be not only a hearer, but a doer too. Help me to be a person who lives in Your promises and delights in them. Thank You for friends, but thank You especially for Jesus, the friend above all friends. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

I am challenged by today's chapter in which we see the ability of Jesus to identify with people from all different backgrounds. If you are like me, sometimes we can be way too narrow minded and think that everyone comes from the same standing, but that just isn't the case. Jesus was accepting of people regardless of their class or creed, loving the unlovable and touching the untouchables. That's what Jesus modelled for us. There is only one door by which people may enter, one way to God – through Jesus Christ. He is the only door. The great thing is, though, that anyone can come to Him from any background, by any road. Today we meet several people with diverse backgrounds and varying approaches to Jesus, all different in how they express faith. It is interesting to see how Jesus responds to all with love and compassion, but also with a wisdom that connected with where they were right at that time. A Roman officer, a widow, the widow's son raised from the dead, a sinful woman, Simon the Pharisee ... what a mixed bag of personalities, and yet Jesus connected with them all, made them all feel loved, respected, and challenged, winning them for the kingdom. What incredibly rich lessons in effective evangelism we have in this chapter.

Another section of today's reading that gives me great hope is the part where two disciples of John are sent by him to ask Jesus if He is the Messiah or if they should be looking for another. Now, if that doesn't sound like a doubt, I don't know what does. You see, when in doubt, we can take it to Jesus.

Watch how He answers: *"Go and tell John what you see and hear, the blind see, the lame walk, the dead are raised to life and the good news is preached to the poor."* I can only imagine these disciples returning to John's prison cell, relaying this response, and John lying back with his head on a stone slab with a smile on his face. Maybe his response was just a simple, 'YES!'

### Pray

Father, I pray for courage to take risks in reaching out to those around me who are open to learning about Christ. Help me to be accepting of all classes and creeds. Forgive me for judging, even in my heart. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

I love that I am related to and acquainted with the Jesus who calms the storm, casts out devils, heals the sick, and raises the dead. This chapter is an action-packed passage of Scripture in which Jesus does all of these things. Sometimes people can be drawn to the spectacular, but I want to be like the women in the first three verses, women who declared their love for the name that is above every other name, Jesus. These women had received the tender acceptance and healing of their Saviour and entrusted their lives to Him, following Him to the very end, putting Jesus' closest men to shame.

Jesus goes on to tell the story of the farmer scattering seed. It's a story we are all too familiar with, and I feel it doesn't get our attention the way it really should. Jesus tells us that if we have ears to hear, we should listen to what He is saying to us. In Mark's rendering of the story, Jesus says if we don't understand this parable, how can we understand any other? Obviously, something very significant is being relayed here. Jesus gives four examples of soil. It is important to note that there is never an issue with the seed. The difference lies in the soils, representative of the condition of the heart. How is your heart today? Hard and impenetrable? Stony and dry? Overgrown with weeds and worries? Or is it good soil? This is the type that brings forth fruit, good fruit that will last, and that is all that matters. The reason this is so important is that out of the heart spring forth abundance and life.

Another familiar story that I love is the lady with the issue of blood who touched Jesus' coat-tail. She overcame weakness, shame, culture, and every conceivable reason why she shouldn't touch the Saviour. What about us today? What are we allowing to keep us from touching Him and receiving His fresh look and gift of grace? Grace is not just for salvation; it is the fuel of every child of God. I burn more grace than most, believe me!

**Pray**

Father, I thank You for the signs of Your power in my world that move me to worship and obey Jesus Christ as Lord of the universe. I am so thankful that I can worship You, all-powerful and all-loving God. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Michael MacWhite, an Irish diplomat born in 1883 and died in 1958 (the year I was born), said this, *"It has been my experience that superior people are attracted only by challenge. By setting our standards low and making our life soft we have, quite automatically and unconsciously, assured ourselves of mediocre people."* I love this, and I love looking at the bunch of renegade soldiers/disciples that Jesus sends out to the mission field in this chapter today. The Gospels tell us little about their backgrounds, but they tell us an awful lot about how Jesus trained them, which I find so reassuring and helpful. A little exercise I have done over the past forty plus years is to constantly read the Gospels and see how Jesus reacted to people and situations. Jesus' on-the-job training was so powerful, like the story of feeding the five thousand when Jesus says to His disciples, *"You feed them."* I can only imagine their faces and their thoughts at that moment. It is recorded they said, *"Do You want us to go and buy food? Where will we get the money for such a feast?"* Natural responses to a supernatural Saviour.

We then get to one of my all-time favourite stories – the Transfiguration. Jesus takes His famous three up the mount and becomes God-like in a split second. Moses and Elijah turn up for a chat around His soon departure, and Peter has a verbal melt-down because of the grip of terror he is in. It is pretty significant that the word 'transfiguration' and 'transformation' are the same in the Greek language. In Romans 12:2 we are reminded to not conform to this world, rather be *transformed* by the renewing of our minds. Could Jesus have been giving us a peep at what a renewed mind should look like? It is something completely other-worldly; the Greek meaning of 'transformed' is 'other, completely different'. One moment Jesus was human-like, the next moment He was God-like. Is it any wonder the guys were terrified!

### Pray

Father, I need You to flood my heart with Your presence today. Confirm the promise that I can do all things through You, as You give me strength. Jesus, help me walk today as a person of faith, hope, and love. Give me the wisdom and power You promise. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

Today Jesus is sending out His followers with some good old home truths that would be good for us to learn. Have you ever thought that what we pray for is more than likely what we live for? Pretty daunting I think, which compels me to examine what I pray for and to consider whether or not it is a true indication of what I live for. Such an exercise can be a little convicting as we have a tendency to pray small prayers, prayers focused on our little corner of the world. Sorry if I'm generalising, but by in large we can pray with a focus on the here and now – God getting us out of our jams or restoring our health, God making our lives better, helping our family, friends, or church. These are all good and important matters for us to bring to God in prayer, however, could our prayers be enlarged? I really think they can be. Oftentimes there is a thought pattern that all our problems will be solved when we become a Christian. Unfortunately, this is not the case as we still live in a fallen and broken world and the gospel of 'healthy, wealthy and whole' is not the gospel of the New Testament. The truth of suffering for the kingdom doesn't fit into the western way of avoiding discomfort and inconvenience. Instant gratification is the order of the day, yet no goal could be further from Jesus' way of life for His disciples while here on earth. Some questions to consider today: what has been costly for you in following Jesus? How is your relationship with Jesus in the middle of hardship, pain, loss, and suffering?

At the end of today's chapter, we have the famous story of Mary and Martha. Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet drinking in every word while Martha is rushing madly around trying to do all the work. Who do you gel with the most, Mary or Martha? I trust today you can find a spot to sit at the Master's feet and drink in His presence.

**Pray**

Father, may this day be a day when I pray bigger prayers, and sit longer at Your feet with much more attentiveness to You and Your words. Help me to switch off my phone and be present with the King of kings. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

I can tell you truthfully that I am not an expert on prayer, and I'm sure, like me, you feel challenged by this reading today. I'm the first to admit my prayer barometer is dangerously low at times. We all need a fresh revelation of God's great goodness and our own frailty. I really want the persistence of the friend who went on a door-banging campaign at midnight to make sure his hungry friend got a sandwich. My prayer and cry today resounds with the disciples, 'Lord, teach me to pray.' It is evident that there are different levels of prayer. There are things we get through simply asking, other things we have to search and seek for, and still other things take downright persistence and ongoing knocking. It was Andrew Murray who pointed out that intercessory prayer is part of God's training school. This deep level of prayer is where our sonship, fellowship, and friendship with God is tested, as well as our love for others. Our prayer life is a good barometer of the true condition of our spiritual life and our maturity and fellowship with Jesus Christ. What happened in this parable? A man took the weary traveller and friend into his home at midnight. He did not excuse himself with 'I've had a hard day, and have no food, so clear off and go somewhere else.' He sacrificed his night's rest and went out in the darkness to find the needed bread. Real and true love always gives of itself, its time, and its comfort for the needs of others. It is never self-seeking. How's your prayer barometer reading?

I love Jesus' little analogy of the earthly father compared to the heavenly Father. What earthly father would ever trick his children and give them a stone instead of bread or a scorpion instead of an egg? If we know how to dispense good gifts, how much more would God want to bless His children and give us unlimited access and anointing of the Holy Spirit? I love this chapter which is full of all different levels and types of prayer. May we all be challenged to up the ante!

**Pray**

Father, I pray today with a fresh new perseverance and persistence. Help me not to give up and give in so easily, but to fight the good fight of faith right through to my dying breath. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Self-image is such a massive problem in today's society and it seems to be an increasing problem as time ticks on. Suicide is at an all-time high with clinical depression becoming an epidemic. I love how in today's reading Jesus says, *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."* How that thrills my soul as I ponder the magnitude of this little statement. I thank God I am His child; I am blood bought and redeemed; I have the assurance of Him as my Father and Heaven as my home. In verses 6-7, Jesus gives us an idea of just how valuable we are to the Father, a Father Who knows the number of hairs on our head (not too difficult for some of us), Who keeps track of the sparrows, and reminds us of how much more value we are than the sparrow. Have you ever really thought about how valuable you are to God? He loved you enough to give His Son for you, and He loves you enough to help you live life fully on earth. Sometimes I think we forget just how valuable we are to God. Please stop and meditate on these verses. No matter what you have done, you can't shake off or lose God's love.

If your struggle today is around self-image, discouragement, depression, and maybe even deep dark thoughts of ending your life, remember this: the Bible says that we are accepted in the Beloved, and we are new creations in Him (Ephesians 1:6 / 2 Corinthians 5:17). So look to Jesus today; He is the Author and the Finisher of our faith, One who will finish the work He has started in us (Hebrews 12:2 / Philippians 1:6). I know the theologians will not like this next statement, but I have to say it. I love the red-letter edition. I love reading the words of Jesus. Theologians say, 'Is it not *all* God's Word?' And while I know that to be true, there is something about His direct instruction. I feel like I can hear His voice as I read these red words.

### Pray

Father, help me today to not only interpret the colour of sky as it relates to weather, but also to discern what You are speaking into my soul. Oh that my soul will be attuned to the spiritual antenna. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

This chapter reminds us that God is surely coming again to judge the living and the dead. It explains why the kingdom of God was taken from Israel, and why the Gentiles have come to play a very prominent part in God's program for the church. It also admonishes Christians that as the time of Christ's return draws near, we need to be found watching and waiting for Him. We need to be faithful to proclaim and hold forth the gospel, which is the light that we are to carry to all men. We are not to hide this light any more than Israel was to hide it. Let's be reminded of our responsibility to live for Him and also to shout His name from the rooftops to our neighbours and friends.

Verse 22 tells us of the narrow door. I often envisage this as a narrow corridor in which there is no room to carry baggage. Baggage must be offloaded for there to be freedom to walk this passage unhindered. Jesus also tells us that one day the owner of the house will come to close the door. People will turn up and demand entry only to be told, *"I never knew you."* This is a pretty daunting verse that has disturbed many people over the years. My observation, for what it's worth, is the usage of the little word 'we' in the response of the people in this passage, *"Have we not ate and drank with You?"*, and in the passage found in Matthew 7, *"Have we not prophesied in Your name?"* Jesus' reply is sobering, but notice the absence of the word 'we' and the emphasis on 'you' – *"I never knew YOU"*. It is easy to get into a corporate room full of people and worship. It is easy to lay claims to the things your church is doing and use the word 'we' in that context, all of which is perfectly good in its own right. But all this must be done from a pure heart that is committed personally to Jesus. How is your personal relationship with Jesus?

### Pray

Father, today I want to make sure my relationship with You is more about 'me' than 'we'. Stir my heart afresh so that evangelism is my utmost call, and may my dependency on You rise to new levels. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

It's easy to become a little careless, under-committed and downright lethargic. The parable Jesus told at a Pharisee's table infuses us with God's heart and perspective. Jesus has been invited to the home of a prominent Pharisee for Sabbath dinner. The house is filled with the Pharisee's socially prominent guests who are all experts in the Law. Jesus heals a man suffering from abnormal swelling in his body, someone who, with a condition like this, probably stood out in the crowd. I love how Jesus loved the unlovable, touched the untouchable and healed the unhealable. Jesus then comments on the guests' grovelling for position, those who take the best seat to advance their social status. He goes into the parable of the wedding feast where His message is ... 'Invite those who can't repay you, for then you have an opportunity to receive a reward from God.' God has deeply touched our lives with His grace, so it would only be right for us to bless others through that same grace and mercy, using the blessings He has bestowed upon us.

With renewed hope and strength, let's pray God will help us to reach out to others in their time of need. It is important to remember we can do everything through Him who gives us strength. I find it interesting that after the call to go into the highways and the byways to find the poor, broken, crippled and blind, Jesus then endorses the cost of real discipleship. He uses the analogy of counting the cost in the terms of building a house and fighting a war. I have often wondered about the significance of these two illustrations, building and fighting! After doing this job for many decades, I do not think this is a coincidence. To serve Him, you must count the cost, prepare for war and consider your pain threshold! As we close out the chapter, can I remind you of how we started this devotional today ... *'It's easy to become a little careless, under-committed and downright lethargic.'* So let's stay salty and not lose our edge!

### Pray

Father, thank You for loving me more than I can comprehend. I know I will find rest and my burdens will be light because I trust in You with all my heart. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

I love these three stories: a lost sheep that wandered off and needed retrieving; a lost coin that got dropped through no fault of its own and needed searched for; and two lost sons who needed to learn the lesson of a new way, a lesson that no one could teach them, rather, one that they must learn for themselves. The message that these three parables brought home to the Pharisees and scribes is painfully clear: they cared too much for their own lost possessions, and they cared little for lost people. This is why they could not rejoice at the repentance of lost sinners. But there is even more to it than this. It isn't just that the Pharisees and scribes found it impossible to rejoice; they actively resisted and grumbled. The bottom line was that the Pharisees wrongly believed that it was good works that merited God's favour, rather than His grace manifested toward sinners. The older brother was angry with the father because he felt he did not get what he deserved, while the younger brother got what he didn't deserve. The older brother's works didn't work, but the younger brother's lack of works did because repentance did the work for him. That is the way God's grace works; it is bestowed on unworthy people, sinners who do not trust in their good works, but in God's grace. Oh, I love this grace!

The psalmist says, *"He restores my soul"*. Oh how we need to be refreshed anew in God and be alive again in the joy of being in His presence. We need God's help in getting back to reading and hearing His healing Word. We need His healing touch in our lives to be real to us, to speak to our hearts, and breathe new life into us. The picture of a father who hauls his long robe up, bares his legs and runs to his wayward son who had squandered his living and ended up in a pig farm was unthinkable to the Pharisees and leaders listening to this story. But we know such a Father, don't we?

**Pray**

Father, I pray You will restore my soul that I might walk in righteousness and bring glory to You. I believe, with Your help, I can overcome these uncertain times in my life and have a new, fresh beginning with a resurrected hope in You and a new future with You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

I have often scanned this first story in today's chapter, trying to figure out what Jesus was actually teaching us through a dishonest manager. I have come to a few conclusions about him and how we can learn several points from his disreputable dealings. First, he knew he would be called to account for his life, and he took that seriously. We definitely should take seriously the truth that we will be called to account, and I really want that to be a joy; it will be if we are about our Master's business! Second, the manager took advantage of his present position to arrange a comfortable future, exercising shrewdness in planning ahead. The world is filled with financial planners and advisers, and it is good for Christians to learn how to use their money wisely. Where the problem lies is that when we plan, it can become so easy to take our eye off eternal things and just see the temporal. The important thing is to invest your resources for the Lord *now*. Most of us wait until the day when we think we will have enough. I often think it is a shame that Starbucks coffee, McDonald's burgers and Costa can market themselves better than most Kingdom-based organisations and churches. This is why the master in this story commends the dishonest manager, for the sons of this world are shrewder than the sons of light. That's not a great recommendation!

In the final story today, the over-riding principle that we learn from the rich man and Lazarus is that it is only in this life that any man or woman has the opportunity to be reconciled to God. For those who die in unbelief, there is no second chance, and there is no one to intervene on their behalf. To die without Christ is to be separated from God forever. As believers, this should move us with compassion for the lost and stimulate us to use every means available to proclaim the Gospel of Grace as far and wide as possible. Who can you reach out to today?

### Pray

Father, I pray for myself and those dear to me, that we may be filled with the gift of love. Give me a fresh spirit of wisdom and excellence to serve You well. I pray You will give me an expectant readiness to perform charitable actions for others. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

In this text, our Lord teaches us that we must take sin seriously. In both Matthew 5:27-32 and Mark 9:43-50 Jesus has very sobering words for His disciples on the seriousness of personal sins, those sins which become a stumbling block to us. He teaches that it would be better to sever a limb or gouge out an eye if that would keep us from sin and from hell. While we would like to tone down these words, we must take sin seriously. Let us also be aware of the fact that our wicked hearts are exceedingly deceptive, and thus we can even succeed at re-defining sin in such a way that it appears to be a virtue, rather than a vice. What is your besetting sin? It would be a great idea to talk about it to God today.

At the end of the passage, we have this great question about when the end will come. There will be times when the Christian will long for the coming of Christ; like the martyred saints recorded in Revelation 6, they will cry out, *"How long?"* You can bet your bottom dollar that Jesus is coming again, but the timing is unknown and all speculation is pointless. People will come with false prophecies and false predictions, but we must not leave our work to follow them. The best time for Christ to come upon a man is when he is faithfully and watchfully doing his duty. As a great commentator said, *"No man will foresee it, and all men will see it."* When that day comes, the judgments of God will operate, and two people, who all their lives lived side by side, will discover one is taken and the other left. The warning issued here is that no one can save another, no matter how close. Personal salvation is just that, personal! In reply to the question of when this will happen, Jesus, in quoting a proverb, simply said that it would happen when the necessary conditions were fulfilled. We cannot know that time and we dare not speculate about it. We must live so that whenever He comes, at morning, at midday or at evening, He will find us ready.

### Pray

Father, Your infinite wisdom surpasses my understanding. You are well acquainted with my frailty, weakness, and inconsistencies. Today I come to You in repentance and faith. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

I love this story of the persistent widow, though I'm sure the judge in the story might have a different name for her, like 'nuisance' or 'pest'. Obviously, the story is in connection with our prayer life. Two fundamental elements must be found in our prayers. The first, found in the first eight verses, is persistence based upon the character of God. The second, found in verses 9-14, is humility and repentance, based upon our character, or should I say the lack of it. These two passages on prayer must go together, I believe, because there must be a balance in the way we approach God. On the one hand, we can pray with persistence for the coming kingdom of God and for the establishment of justice on the earth, knowing that the character of God assures us that He will come, that He does hear and answer our prayers, and that He will quickly bring about justice. On the other hand, we must not lose sight of the fact that when we come to God in prayer, we must also come with an awareness of our own fallen character.

After the two types of prayer lesson, Jesus brings us two characters from different ends of the social spectrum. One is a rich young ruler and the other is a blind beggar. One considered the price too great to pay; the other had an opportunity too great to miss. One had kept all the rules only to understand they weren't enough; the other was someone who had probably broken all the rules, and yet he realised his total emptiness before a Saviour who could restore his sight and make him whole. I find the story of the rich young ruler deeply saddening. It would appear that he truly wanted to be different, but his riches had taken such a deep root in his soul, and we are told he walked away sorrowful. On the other hand, the blind beggar ruthlessly and unashamedly pursued the Saviour to find a way into this incredible kingdom, and we are told "*he followed Jesus*". One walks away; the other follows. Such extremes!

### Pray

Father, it is only by Your gift of grace that I can have victory and be brought to salvation. It is all because of Your loving grace and mercy. I know in my heart that nothing can separate me from You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

In Northern Ireland, we have the reputation for the usage of the word 'wee'. So today this story is about a wee man who came to Jesus. A wee man with a big destiny, hiding in the foliage of a tree. Interestingly, according to Google, sycamore timber is hard and strong, pale cream with a fine grain. It is used for making furniture and kitchenware as the wood does not taint food. It was out of such a strong tree that Jesus defined a strong character. I hope you can see through Zacchaeus' story that Jesus Christ is a great Saviour for great sinners. Jesus came to seek and to save the worst of sinners and all who respond to His call with joyful repentance will hear Him pronounce, *"Today salvation has come to this house!"* I love how Jesus made Zacchaeus belong long before he ever believed. That is what Jesus did best and why He was known for being a friend to publicans and sinners. It is powerful to see how this man's encounter with the living Saviour changed his life forever. It changed everything about him, right down to his handling, or should I say mishandling, of finances.

The second story in today's chapter is entitled 'The Triumphal Entry'. I suppose in the eyes of the beholders, it was anything but triumphal. A man on a donkey. Most didn't know the facts surrounding that donkey; it had never been broken in, and it was borrowed for the occasion. Who could ever think this might be the Messiah, the Son of God? As we read today, we see how broken Jesus becomes over the state of so-called religious things. He weeps over the city of Jerusalem at the state of their blindness, and righteous anger grips His very soul as He enters the temple. He sees the dealings within, the immoral practices of these so-called 'religious leaders' who robbed the poor and had no conscience at all about it. I love the fact that in this final story today, Jesus called His house (the only thing He ever called His house) a house of prayer for all nations. I think that is pretty prophetic.

### Pray

Father, thank You for my friends. I ask that You bless them and keep them safe in Your love. Watch over them and be mindful of their needs. May I be known as a friend to others. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

The further into Jesus' ministry we go, and the closer to Calvary Luke takes us, the more the plot thickens. If you are a constant reader of the Gospels, you will indeed have picked this up. The conversations seem more loaded and laced with hatred, conniving how to rid the world of this man, Jesus.

Questions about taxes, marriage and divorce, doubting the resurrection, and whose Son the Messiah is are all on the menu today, starting with the religious leaders challenging Jesus' authority. I find it intriguing that they couldn't deny what Jesus was doing; the facts spoke for themselves. Their jealousy was chewing them up, so they go at it from this angle, 'What and who gives You the right to do these things?' Jesus fobs them off with what I call a 'I can't be bothered with you' kind of answer, and then verse 9 gives the ultimate snub. Jesus turns His back on them, ignores them, and begins talking to the people. Oh boy, if they were cross before, Jesus just turned the heat up dramatically. The story He tells is of a tenant farming relationship, which was a common practice in Jesus' day, especially in Galilee. In a day when title was sometimes uncertain, anyone who had the use of land for three years was presumed to own it, in the absence of anyone else making a claim on it. The vinedressers didn't buy the vineyard, nor did they make it. They were allowed to work it by a generous owner, yet they turned against the owner, and one day would answer for it. Jesus was, of course, using this parable to tell us that God, the owner of all, is more patient with rebels than we would ever be, but there is a final day of reckoning. *"This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and get the estate for ourselves"*, shows the foolishness of fallen mankind, thinking that if they kill the Son, they can take the owner's inheritance! How are you working today with your inheritance that He has given you?

**Pray**

Father, help me today to treat all that I have as given from Your hand. I realise that just as a pot can become pot-bound, so I can become earth-bound, and I never want that. Please give me a fresh eternal perspective on my life and my things. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

What a powerful lesson resides in these first four verses. Jesus is unashamedly watching how people perform in the area of giving. A widow drops in two small coins, small in size and small in value. Jesus then proceeds to give us one of the most powerful spiritual 101's in all of Scripture, and it's around value. Notice please that Jesus did not say that she put in more than anyone; He said that she put in more than ALL of them, that means all of them put together! How could it possibly be said that she put in more than everyone? Because all the others gave out of their abundance; she gave sacrificially, out of her poverty. This means that the poor man can serve and please God just as much as a rich man. It doesn't matter if you are poor in influence, in gifts, or in money. If you sacrificially give God what you have, He sees it and is pleased.

What, in God's eyes, determines the value of a gift? Remember that God does not need our money, rather it is our privilege to give to Him. Giving is necessary for our sake, not for God's sake. A gift's value is determined by the spirit in which it is given. God doesn't want grudgingly given money or guilt money. God loves the cheerful giver. The value of a gift is determined by what it *cost* the giver; this is what made the widow's gift so valuable. I love how David, in 2 Samuel 24:24, refused to give God *that which cost him nothing*. God doesn't need our money but I've been learning over the years that we desperately can't do without His blessings, which are, of course, closely linked to how and what we give. Jesus was watching not only what people put in, He was examining the attitude of the heart as well. The widow gave two mites, not just one. She could have kept one coin for herself, and who would blame her if she did? Giving one would mean giving half of all her money. But in giving two mites, her giving has a certain recklessness about it. May God make us reckless in our giving and loving today.

### Pray

Father, thank You for the great God of generosity that You are. I can never out-love You and I certainly can't out-give You. May I lean on You for everything, today and every day. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Live

Today's chapter begins Luke's version of the Passion of Christ. The story of the crucifixion extends through chapters 22 and 23, while resurrection is the topic of chapter 24. The account begins with Judas' betrayal, Jesus' final meal with His disciples, and Peter's horrific denial. It is a journey of bitter, gut-wrenching disappointment as Jesus watches the demise of His beloved friend, Judas; His best friend Peter crumpling into a lying wreck, denying Him; and all His close followers running away. One can only imagine the hurt and pain this must have caused Jesus. We can use our own reference points as we think about our own disappointments with other human beings, but they surely don't measure up to this. There is a brief mention of Satan in verse 3 that could easily be missed, but it is important for us to understand that this is not merely a human conflict. The enemies of God and all that He loves are concerned about the outcome of this God/Man on planet earth.

Jesus' final moments with His disciples involve a farewell meal as He celebrates Passover with them. One of my big takeaways from today's chapter has to be the fact that success is not guaranteed for those associated with Jesus. We dare not become complacent. I have sat with far too many men and women of God as they've wept at what they've become or where they have stooped to. I can hear my mum's voice as she would say to me as a boy, *"Son, tread carefully with the things of God; handle them as you'd handle precious gems. The testimony of a lifetime can be lost in a second."* I had no idea the wisdom she was entrenching into my young life, wisdom that would serve me all my days. Such failure is always tragic and difficult to spring back from, if ever. The Message version says that when the cock crowed, *"[Peter] went out and cried and cried and cried."* I often wonder, was the travail of his soul so great because he did something he never thought he would do? Beware. Stay close. Keep short accounts with God!

## Pray

Father, as I begin my focus on the Passion of Christ over the next few days, melt my hard heart once again to the enormous price that You paid for my redemption. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

My mum always struggled to read this chapter; she said it broke her heart all over again each time. I must admit, it is hard to stay emotionless as we read the account of Jesus' death. We can't even begin to imagine what went on in the courtrooms of heaven on that day. Hymn writers have depicted heaven standing still, and Robin Mark uses the terminology of 'the Holy Spirit brooding around an empty throne'. The Son of God, the King of heaven, Creator of the universe, bows His head and gives up His life for the sins of the world. God's heart must have been broken as He watched His own creation stir up against His only Son; the creation against their Creator. They brutalised Him. He was more marred than any man, Isaiah 52 reminds us. This chapter is the hinge pin of our whole Bible and why it even exists in the first place. It is such a poignant passage.

As the reading is sufficient and I dare not add or take away from it, here is a simple breakdown of the events. In verses 1-5 we have Jesus' interrogation before Pilate, the Roman governor. In verses 6-12 we see His examination before Herod, who was governor of Galilee under the Romans. Verses 13-25 tell us of Pilate's struggle with the people to release Jesus, his repeated testimonies concerning His innocence, but, in the end, his cracking under the pressure to their insistence, condemning Him to be crucified. Verses 26-31 give an account of what passed as they led Him to be crucified, and His discourse to the people who followed. While verses 32-38 give an account of what passed at the place of execution and the shameful indignities done to Him there, verses 39-43 give us the conversion of one of the thieves as Christ was hanging on the Cross. After what is a marathon of a chapter, verses 44-49 tell us of the death of Christ, our beautiful Saviour, and the people who stood around Him. Lastly, verses 50-56 tell us of His burial in a borrowed tomb.

### Pray

Father, how can I ever thank You that You gave Jesus up as a sacrifice for me. How can I not love Him? I stand redeemed by His blood today and for that, and everything else, I say a million thank Yous. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

I know I say it a lot, but here I go again ... I love this chapter! My Jesus, my eternal Saviour, bursting forth from the bands of death, chucking aside the death robes like a bunch of dirty rags, conquering death and hell for us all. I get excited every time I read this chapter that displays the power, strength and weight of glory that my Jesus carries. A key feature for me today is the note of surprise among the disciples that Jesus is now alive again. Among the women, the disciples, and the Emmaus travellers, there is no hint that resurrection was anticipated by them. This surprise is worthy of note because it shows that even Jesus' own followers had to be convinced of His resurrection. Their surprise might seem strange, given Jesus' predictions of His resurrection over and over again. It is clear that the disciples never grasped the point of what Jesus was promising. There is a very powerful statement in verse 45, "*[Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*" He is the revealer of secrets, the One who unveils all mysteries.

Then we read that Jesus departed into the heaven from which He came. He said the very fact He would go would make it possible for another to come, not to disappoint us but to intercede for us, the promised Holy Spirit. The only thing that could possibly be better than Jesus here in the flesh is Jesus here in ALL flesh, and so He departed with a blessing. He equipped us with a final command: 'Stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with the power from heaven.' I suggest to you that if these followers of Jesus couldn't go to work without the fullness of the Holy Spirit, then nor dare we. For those who know and love Him, His blessing is always with us. So, we worship Him with joy and serve Him with gladness, continually blessing God for the gift of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Amazing! What a story Luke has unveiled for us, one that he opened up to the Gentiles. Matthew was much more centred on the Jews, here in Luke, everyone gets to play!

**Pray**

Father, the old hymn writer hit the mark when he penned, "*Man of sorrows*", *what a name / For the Son of God who came / Ruined sinners to reclaim / Hallelujah! What a Saviour!*' In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

